

ISAT Curriculum and Instructional Validity

The Question: Do the ISAT assessment tests have curriculum and instructional validity?

The Importance of the Matter: Idaho law as well as the “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001 require states to adopt challenging content expectations and then determine the degree to which the expectations are being met. To achieve this, the school curriculum must match the content expectations, and teachers are expected to teach the desired content. Maintaining the alignment of the curriculum and the instructional programs will provide students with the greatest opportunity to learn. In previous litigation about high school graduation tests, the courts have ruled that curriculum and instructional validity issues must be adequately addressed.

Methodology of Research: This study included three different components. (1) Evidence submitted by NWEA was reviewed. (2) Idaho school districts conducted a self-study. (3) Six districts were visited for an on-site review.

Synopsis of Findings: NWEA information did not directly address issues related to curriculum and instructional validity, as these are ordinarily not the responsibility of the test support contractor. Instead, they are the responsibility of local school districts, the State Department of Education, and the State Board of Education.

All school district superintendents were asked to respond to a 30-item written survey soliciting information about curriculum and instructional activities supporting the Idaho content expectations. Ninety-seven percent of the superintendents responded to the survey, but thirteen percent did not prepare an executive summary as requested. The quality of the responses varied.

Superintendents reported that students and parents had been informed about the assessment program, including the high school graduation requirements. Districts apparently have aligned their curriculum with the content expectations, but it is not clear that individual schools are being monitored in this regard. Superintendents asserted that their teachers were teaching the content expectations and that student remediation opportunities were being provided. The superintendents indicated that the ISAT data were being used.

On-site visits were conducted in 10 schools across six districts. Results were varied, with the larger districts seemingly better prepared to assist schools align the curriculum and instruction to the Idaho Content Standards. Smaller districts lacked the human resources to provide a sufficient level of services. Some districts depend upon the state-adopted texts to address the content expectations whereas larger districts have tailored their own curriculum guides. Some educators were concerned that the Idaho Content Standards were not always being taught. According to the report, more professional development is needed. Remedial activities varied, with more rural locations having the most difficulty providing adequate services.

Implications for Future Direction:

Although based on self-reports, it is reassuring that the survey of superintendents and the on-site visits revealed an awareness of the responsibilities educators have with regard to curriculum and instructional validity. However, there are inconsistencies across the State in the degree to which schools can be said to be effectively providing students with the opportunity to learn the Idaho Content Standards. This is an on-going task because new students are enrolled throughout the year, and they (and their parents) must be provided with information about content expectations. Likewise, new teachers and principals are hired each year, and they must learn how to emphasize providing students the opportunity to learn.

The State should seek ways to continuously inform the various publics about the educational expectations and the manner in which the ISAT can facilitate good instruction. Efforts should be undertaken periodically to verify that schools and districts understand the importance of curriculum and instructional validity and that they are actively strengthening students' opportunity to learn.

Report: [Idaho Standards Achievement Test: Review of Northwest Evaluation Association Curriculum Validity and Instructional Validity Documentation, Task 3.0.4.1](#)

Report: [Idaho Standards Achievement Test: District Self-Study \(DSS\) Findings Regarding Curricular and Instructional Validity, Task 3.0.4.2](#)

Report: [Idaho District Self-Study \(DSS\): Executive Summaries, Task 3.0.4.2](#)

Report: [Idaho Standards Achievement Test: Curriculum Validity and Instructional Validity Study Results from On-Site Visits to Six Idaho Public School Districts, Task 3.0.4.2](#)